

Sinica venetiana 1

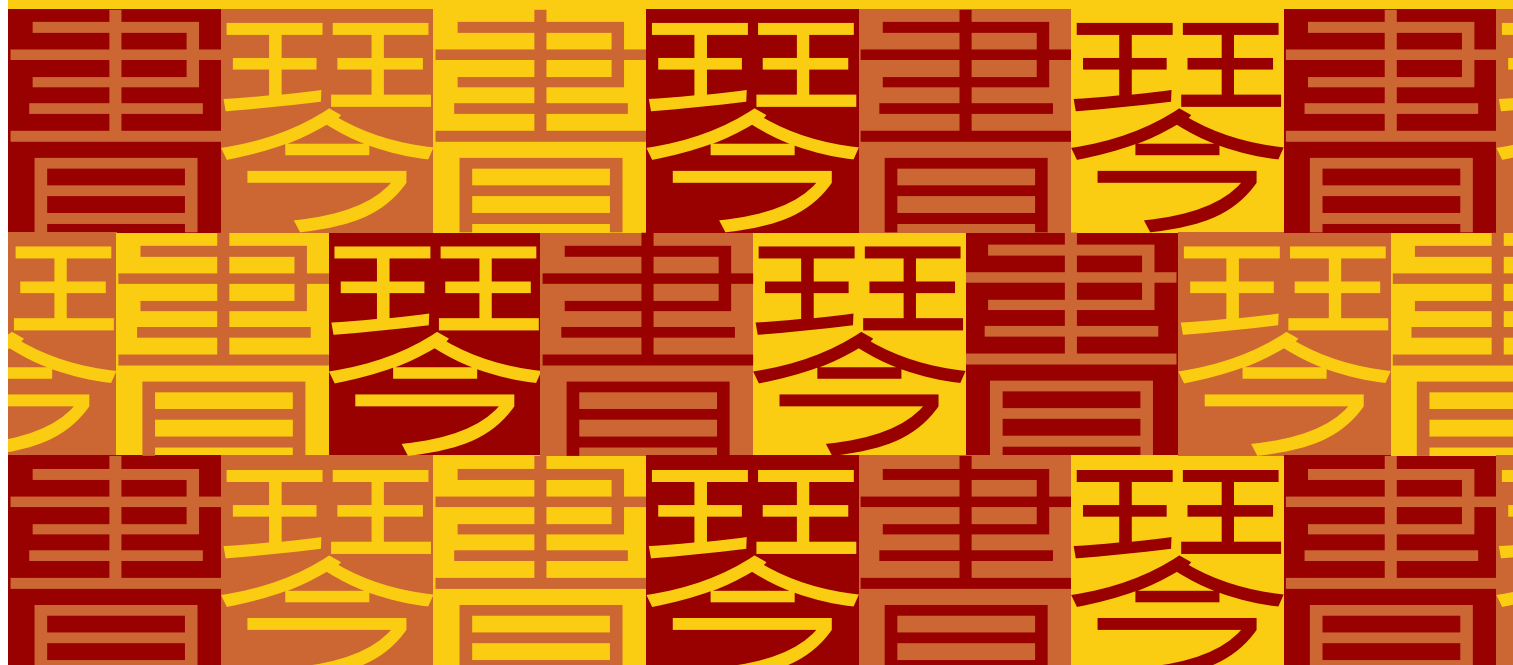
Il liuto e i libri

Studi in onore di Mario Sabattini

a cura di
Magda Abbiati, Federico Greselin



Edizioni
Ca' Foscari



Il liuto e i libri

Sinica venetiana

Collana diretta da
Tiziana Lippiello, Chen Yuehong

1



Edizioni
Ca' Foscari

Sinica venetiana

La collana «Sinica venetiana» è dedicata agli studi sulla Cina antica, moderna e contemporanea. Essa raccoglie monografie ed edizioni critiche di testi relativi alla cultura, storia, arte, economia, politica, relazioni internazionali, ambiente, avvalendosi di un approccio interdisciplinare. I volumi della collana interesseranno di volta in volta tematiche di ricerca diverse: dalla letteratura alla storia, dagli aspetti socio-culturali ed economici a quelli politici ed ambientali della società cinese in una prospettiva non limitata ai singoli settori.

The series «Sinica venetiana» deals with disciplines related to China, from ancient to contemporary times. The volumes will collect articles on various fields of research, from literature to art and history, from socio-cultural and economic aspects to politics, international relations and environmental issues, with an interdisciplinary approach.

Direzione scientifica | Scientific editors

Tiziana Lippiello (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia)

Chen Yuehong (Beijing University, China)

Comitato scientifico | Scientific committee

Chen Hongmin (Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, China) Sean Golden (UAB Barcelona, España) Roger Greatrex (Lunds Universitet, Sverige) Jin Yongbing (Beijing University, China) Olga Lomova (Univerzita Karlova v Praze, Česká Republika) Burchard Mansvelt Beck (Universiteit Leiden, Nederland) Michael Puett (Harvard University, Cambridge, USA) Tan Tian Yuan (SOAS, London, UK) Hans van Ess (LMU, München, Deutschland) Giuseppe Vignato (Beijing University, China) Wang Keping (CASS, Beijing, China) Yamada Tatsuo (Keio University, Tokyo, Japan) Yang Zhu (Beijing University, China)

Comitato editoriale | Editorial board

Magda Abbiati (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia) Attilio Andreini (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia) Giulia Baccini (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia) Bianca Basciano (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia) Daniele Beltrame (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia) Daniele Brombal (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia) Alfredo Cadonna (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia) Renzo Cavalieri (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia) Marco Ceresa (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia) Laura De Giorgi (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia) Franco Gatti (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia) Federico Greselin (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia) Tiziana Lippiello (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia) Paolo Magagnin (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia) Tobia Maschio (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia) Federica Passi (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia) Nicoletta Pesaro (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia) Elena Pollacchi (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia) Sabrina Rastelli (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia) Guido Samarani (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia)

Direzione e redazione | Head office

Dipartimento di Studi sull'Asia e sull'Africa Mediterranea

Università Ca' Foscari Venezia

Palazzo Vendramin dei Carmini

Dorsoduro 3462

30123 Venezia

Italia

Il liuto e i libri

Studi in onore di Mario Sabattini

a cura di

Magda Abbiati, Federico Greselin

Venezia

Edizioni Ca' Foscari - Digital Publishing

2014

Il liuto e i libri: Studi in onore di Mario Sabattini
Magda Abbiati, Federico Greselin (a cura di).

© 2014 Magda Abbiati, Federico Greselin

© 2014 Edizioni Ca' Foscari - Digital Publishing per la presente edizione

Qualunque parte di questa pubblicazione può essere riprodotta, memorizzata in un sistema di recupero dati o trasmessa in qualsiasi forma o con qualsiasi mezzo, elettronico o meccanico, senza autorizzazione, a condizione che se ne citi la fonte.

Any part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means without permission provided that the source is fully credited.

Edizioni Ca' Foscari - Digital Publishing
Università Ca' Foscari Venezia
Dorsoduro 3246
30123 Venezia
<http://edizionicafoscari.unive.it/>
ecf@unive.it

1a edizione ottobre 2014

ISBN 978-88-97735-82-3 (pdf)

ISBN 978-88-97735-81-6 (stampa)

Progetto grafico di copertina: Studio Girardi, Venezia | Edizioni Ca' Foscari
Immagine di copertina: Federico Greselin

Volume pubblicato con il sostegno dell'Istituto Confucio
presso l'Università Ca' Foscari Venezia



威尼斯大学孔子学院

Istituto Confucio
presso l'Università
Ca' Foscari Venezia

Sommario

| | |
|---|-----|
| Lionello Lanciotti | |
| Per Mario | 11 |
| Introduzione | 13 |
| Mario Sabattini: bibliografia essenziale | 19 |
| Magda Abbiati | |
| Lo spettro della felicità | |
| Corrispondenza lessicale ed equivalenza semantica | 23 |
| Attilio Andreini (艾帝) | |
| 釋“爨” | |
| ——關於上海博物館所藏竹書《恆先》的一些問題 | 45 |
| Ester Bianchi | |
| Quando rigore e rigenerazione si incontrano | |
| Procedure di ordinazione e disciplina monastica nell'ambito del revival del Buddhismo cinese contemporaneo | 53 |
| Barbara Bisetto | |
| Romanzo ed educazione alla storia | |
| Scritti sul romanzo storico nel quinquennio 1902-1906 | 67 |
| Clara Bulfoni | |
| «Parole per mangiare» | |
| Dizionari multilingue per Expo 2015 | 79 |
| Michela Bussotti | |
| Media in transizione | |
| Il passaggio dalla xilografia alla litografia: osservazioni preliminari su due edizioni del <i>Registro di giada</i> | 91 |
| Alfredo Cadonna | |
| Inventario e traduzione dei binomi ecòici (per raddoppiamento del carattere) nelle 160 Arie degli Stati (Guofeng 國風) del Classico dei Canti (Shijing 詩經) | 105 |
| Daniela Campo | |
| Disciplina monastica e moderate aperture | |
| Una nuova prospettiva sul revival buddhista di epoca repubblicana (1912-1949) | 125 |

| | | |
|---|--|-----|
| Patrizia Carioti | | |
| Echoes of the Ming-Qing conflict | | |
| Notes on the political role of the overseas Chinese in Nagasaki | | 137 |
| Giorgio Casacchia | | |
| Xu Xiake il Deambulatore | | 157 |
| Lucia Caterina | | |
| La via della porcellana bianca e blu | | 177 |
| Andrea Cavazzuti | | |
| Tirando un po' le somme | | 185 |
| Antonella Ceccagno | | |
| Farewell to <i>tuhao</i>, welcome to <i>tuhao</i> | | |
| Language and society in China as they emerge from the buzzwords of the last decade | | 193 |
| Nicoletta Celli | | |
| All'alba dell'arte buddhista in Cina | | |
| Nuove proposte interpretative sull'icona del Buddha in meditazione | | 205 |
| Marco Ceresa | | |
| From flavor to behavior | | |
| Some Chinese texts on taste | | 221 |
| Elisabetta Corsi | | |
| La diffusione delle conoscenze ottiche in Cina | | |
| Il primato della visione nel <i>Xingxue cushu</i> (1623) di Giulio Aleni SI | | 231 |
| Amina Crisma | | |
| La riscoperta del <i>Neiye</i> 内業 nel rinnovamento degli studi sul pensiero della Cina pre-imperiale | | 241 |
| Davide Cucino | | |
| Acque agitate nel Mar Cinese Orientale | | 255 |
| Patrizia Dadò | | |
| Narrare Hong Kong postcoloniale attraverso storie di cuore e di cucina | | 271 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Francesco D'Arelli | |
| Verso la Cina | |
| Note e curiosità in un viaggio di Salvatore Besso | 281 |
| Laura De Giorgi | |
| Impressioni d'Italia nella Cina di Mao | |
| Cronache italiane dalle pagine di <i>Shijie zhishi</i> 1946-1957 | 291 |
| Francesca Del Gobbo | |
| On Secondary Predication in Mandarin Chinese | 303 |
| Isabella Falaschi | |
| Effetti comici in scene tragiche nel teatro Yuan | 319 |
| Raoul David Findeisen | |
| A century of Cuore (or «Education to love») in China | 331 |
| Riccardo Fracasso | |
| L'accidia di Zai Wo 宰我 | |
| Commento a <i>Lunyu</i> 論語 XVII.21 | 349 |
| Marco Fumian | |
| Fendou: una parola chiave della Cina moderna | 361 |
| Marián Gálik | |
| Lu Xun and his reception in Bohemia and Slovakia | 373 |
| Franco Gatti | |
| Teratofilia e antropofilia | |
| I rapporti tra creature soprannaturali ed esseri umani narrati nel <i>Xuanshi zhi</i> 宣室志 | 391 |
| Maria Gottardo | |
| Zhao Yuanren traduttore | |
| Le avventure di Alice in Cina | 407 |
| Federico Greselin | |
| Gao Jianli vs. Qin Shihuang | |
| Dallo <i>Shiji</i> al Metropolitan | 421 |

| | | |
|--|--|-----|
| Donatella Guida | | |
| L'altra metà del Cielo | | |
| Virtù femminili e capacità maschili nella biografia dell'imperatrice Zhangsun 長孫 (601-636), modello di riferimento dell'imperatrice Ma 馬 della dinastia Ming 明 | | 443 |
| Fiorenzo Lafirenza | | |
| L'uso della metafora nel discorso economico cinese | | 455 |
| Alessandra Lavagnino | | |
| Il contributo di alcuni eminenti studiosi cinesi alla rinascita degli studi sul <i>Wen xin diao long</i> dopo la Rivoluzione culturale | | 467 |
| Barbara Leonesi | | |
| Pirandello è di scena? | | |
| Traduzione, ricezione e messinscena del teatro di Pirandello in Cina | | 483 |
| Tiziana Lippiello | | |
| «A settant'anni seguivo gli impulsi del mio cuore senza incorrere in trasgressioni» | | |
| Il valore del tempo nella cultura cinese classica | | 497 |
| Rosa Lombardi | | |
| Spiriti, demoni, angeli, mostri | | |
| Su Tong e la narrativa fantastica | | 511 |
| Paolo Magagnin | | |
| Le traitement des onomatopées dans les traductions italiennes et françaises de Yu Dafu | | |
| | | 521 |
| Federico Masini | | |
| Early Qing evidences of classifiers usage in Western missionaries Chinese texts | | |
| | | 535 |
| Eugenio Menegon | | |
| Amicitia palatina | | |
| The Jesuits and the politics of gift-giving at the Qing court | | 547 |
| Marina Miranda | | |
| Il «sogno» e il «rinnovamento della nazione cinese» di Xi Jinping | | |
| Alcune implicazioni politiche e storiografiche | | 563 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Paola Mortari Vergara Caffarelli Palden Lhamo, la déesse protectrice des Dalaï lama, dans l'art et l'architecture du Tibet | 575 |
| Monica Morzenti Dragoni e fiori di loto Tri(s)ti titoli e qualche brutta copertina | 591 |
| Corrado Neri L'irruzione dell'io' nel cinema cinese delle origini | 607 |
| Maurizio Paolillo Il giardino del letterato in epoca Bei Song (960-1127) | 619 |
| Federica Passi The role and importance of indigenous peoples in the 'creation' of Taiwanese literature | 633 |
| Tommaso Pellin Words from abroad in China Past, present and future | 645 |
| Nicoletta Pesaro La memoria narrativa Tecniche di rappresentazione della coscienza e menti finzionali nell'ultimo romanzo di Zhang Ailing | 657 |
| Luca Pisano Tra letteratura e politica L'Incidente di Gaoxiong e la letteratura carceraria a Taiwan tra la fine degli anni Settanta e l'inizio degli anni Ottanta | 675 |
| Maria Cristina Pisciotta «Vagare è lieve, grave il pensare» | 689 |
| Antonella Piva Tornerà in Cina Marco Polo? | 701 |
| Elena Pollacchi The rules of the game How film festivals and sales agents have shaped the consumption of Chinese (independent) films | 713 |

| | | |
|---|--|-----|
| Claudia Pozzana | | |
| Althusser and Mao: a missed encounter? | | 725 |
| Silvia Pozzi | | |
| Il romanzo con 'caratteristiche cinesi' | | |
| Un'analisi comparata di <i>Shouhuo</i> di Yan Lianke e <i>Xiongdi</i> di Yu Hua | | 739 |
| Sabrina Rastelli | | |
| Il grande sviluppo della produzione ceramica di epoca Jin | | 753 |
| Elisa Sabattini | | |
| Il valore della meritocrazia nel pensiero politico di Lu Jia | | 767 |
| Guido Samarani | | |
| La svolta del 1949 in Cina | | |
| Radici storiche e sviluppi politici tra continuità e discontinuità | | 777 |
| Paolo Santangelo | | |
| Quando la letteratura ci insegna la storia | | 791 |
| Maurizio Scarpari | | |
| La confucianizzazione della legge | | |
| Nuove norme di comportamento filiale in Cina | | 807 |
| Maria Franca Sibau | | |
| Ritratto dell'artista da giovane | | |
| <i>Le note di scuola del Piccolo Xin</i> di Bao Tianxiao | | 831 |
| Giovanni Stary | | |
| Il mondo turco(fono) nella poesia epica mancese-sibe | | 845 |
| Luca Stirpe | | |
| Sogno e son desto | | |
| Riflessioni sul contesto onirico delle liriche di Li Yu 李煜 (937-978) | | 851 |
| Adolfo Tamburello | | |
| La 'fine' di «Shangdi» come Dio cattolico | | 869 |
| Valeria Varriano | | |
| La muta del serpente bianco | | 879 |
| Stefano Zacchetti | | |
| Note lessicali sino-buddhiste | | 897 |

The rules of the game

How film festivals and sales agents have shaped the consumption of Chinese (independent) films

Elena Pollacchi

Abstract This article examines the role of major European film festivals and sales agents in the exhibition and circulation of Chinese cinema since the late 1980s. After the Fifth Generation of Chinese directors, Chinese film-makers have regularly attended major international film events such as Venice, Cannes and Berlin. However, while festivals have helped to establish the reputation and circulation of the works of Zhang Yuan, Wang Xiaoshuai, Jia Zhangke, Wang Bing and others, they have also shaped a narrative of Chinese independent cinema. How can we discuss the interplay between film festivals and the evolution of the Chinese film scene? What is the role of international sales agents in relation to the presentation of Chinese cinema in Europe? And how have exhibition practices changed over the years since the affirmation of Chinese cinema in the late 1980s? Drawing upon the expanding field of film festival studies, this article suggests that festivals and international sales agents have found a convergence of interests in promoting a certain line of Chinese cinema at a specific historical juncture.

Chinese underground filmmaking attracted international attention in the early 1990s, but media coverage of it has occurred mostly outside China and has been frequently filtered through Eurocentric lenses. (Pickowicz, Zhang 2006, p. VII)

We have confirmed our own membership in the community of international film festival-goers able to extract patterns where none initially existed, to recognize distinctive styles and infer social meaning. (Nichols 1994, p. 27)

1 Introduction

In his pioneering article *Discovering form, inferring meaning: New cinemas and the film festival circuit*, Bill Nichols discussed a common practice shared by many international film festivals at the time, the practice of «discovering new cinemas» which brought successive film waves to world attention between the 1980s and 1990s. In his critical approach to what he defines as the «film festival circuit», Nichols points out how the community of festival organizers, film professionals and an audience of festival-goers started to travel from one festival to another eager to discover forms, infer meanings in world cinema (Nichols 1994, p. 18). He also defined the link between the community of festival-goers and the ‘new cinemas’ that international film festivals were introducing in Europe between the 1980s and 1990s as a shared experience of uncommon cinematic journeys. In-

deed, those visions were distinctive for their regional character but gained universal appeal through the festival exposure.

The subject of Nichols' analysis was the new Iranian cinema, which had just followed the discovery of the Chinese Fifth Generation. In fact, Chen Kaige, Zhang Yimou, Tian Zhuangzhuang and their fellow graduates, who graduated from the Beijing Film Academy in 1982, had regularly participated in festivals since 1988 and had frequently been awarded prizes.¹ Interestingly, although Chinese films and directors still remain largely unknown in Italy and Europe, the set of titles introduced by film festivals in the decade 1988-1999 is still vividly remembered. They include *Hong gaoliang* 红高粱 (*Red sorghum*, 1987), *Da hong denglong gaogao gua* 大红灯笼高高挂 (*Raise the red lantern*, 1992), *Bawang bie ji* 霸王别姬 (*Farewell my concubine*, 1993) and other works distributed in Italy and all over Europe.

In his article, Nichols also pointed out the need to make the viewing context less transparent; he saw festival programmers as displaying an attitude similar to that of the ethnographer: someone in search of images and narratives from remote places to be circulated in the West. Recent analyses have drawn upon Nichols' take and discussed festivals from other angles in order to unpack the entire festival experience.² Indeed, festivals are complex structures in which economic forces and commercial transactions intertwine with other values such as cultural and reputational capital, not to mention prestige and glamour. Thus festivals have been approached as sites of cultural production, as a counter-public sphere (Stringer 2001) or as networks in which various values are transacted (Elsaesser 2005; De Valck 2007).

Moreover, festivals do not simply «celebrate film art»; rather they define (and re-define) film history through a canon of celebrated film directors. In Neal's analysis, this is «the Art Cinema genre» which has countered the dominance of commercial Hollywood films (1981). However, when looking at the ways in which a canon is defined, geo-political, gender and minority issues should also be taken into account in addition to the cultural and aesthetic values expressed in films from regions other than Europe and the US. While all these frameworks have significantly helped to give us a better understanding of the broad constellation of world film

1 The Berlin Golden Bear to Zhang Yimou's *Hong gaoliang* 红高粱 (*Red sorghum*, 1987) in 1988 and Zhang Yimou's second Venice Golden Lion for *Yi ge dou bu neng shao* 一个都不能少 (*Not one less*, 1999) frame the golden years of the Fifth Generation. As the Fifth Generation directors became more prominent in the Chinese film market, their festival participation became more sporadic.

Chinese film titles are listed in their first occurrence with the *pinyin* transcription followed by the Chinese characters, the English title for international distribution and the year of production. The English title only is used for all later occurrences in the text.

2 For an overview of the main theoretical approaches, cf. Iordanova 2014.

festivals, the discussion of specific film traditions within film festivals is still limited.³

In the light of the expanding film festival studies research field, this article discusses the contribution of film festivals to the circulation of Chinese cinema in Italy since the 1990s. Here, I will refer mainly to the three major festivals – Cannes, Venice, Berlin – as their reputation among Chinese film-makers makes them more relevant than any other film event (maybe with the exception of the Academy Awards). As film director Jia Zhangke has stated in a long interview on his participation in Venice, «the history of Venice and Cannes defines these events as the main ones in the world film culture and underlines how presenting films at these three main events [Venice, Cannes, Berlin] is an effective way to give voice to Chinese contemporary culture, Chinese history and issues of today's life in China and, at the same time, is a way to participate in world film culture» (Jia, Wu 2008, p. 69).

Nonetheless, other festivals like Locarno, Rotterdam and Turin have also played a crucial role in promoting upcoming Chinese film-makers at different times and through significant production funds. The focus on these events sustains the reference to «Eurocentrism» in the passage quoted by Pickowicz and Zhang (2006, p. VII). In this article, I move on to suggest that, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, European festivals shaped a certain reading of Chinese independent cinema which has remained prominent regardless of the changes that have occurred in Chinese film production and the Chinese film market.

I will thus outline the converging interests of festivals and Chinese film-makers at a certain stage in the evolution of the Chinese film industry, in particular during the transitional years in which the Chinese cinema turned from being a State-controlled industry into a market-oriented industry partly open to the private sector. My hypothesis is that such a convergence of interests was particularly fruitful for both international film festivals and Chinese cinema until the Chinese film industry became competitive on the global film scene and until Chinese film-makers were in need of expertise in order to attend international events. International sales agents, whose role was essential during the 1990s and through the early 2000s, provided this expertise.⁴

3 Chan (2011) addresses the role of film festivals in the definition of «national cinemas».

4 The concept of this article was first presented at the workshop *A multidisciplinary exploration of Chinese independent films* held at the University of Liège, 13-16 March 2012. The works of the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)-funded International Research Network on Chinese Film Festival Studies significantly informed its development. I am thankful to the network coordinators prof. Chris Berry (King's College London) and dr. Luke Robinson and to the members of the network for their stimulating discussion and insight on the interplay of Chinese cinema and film festivals.

2 From festivals as an ethnographic practice to festivals as marketing platforms

The discovery of new cinemas coincided with a time in which European film festivals were rapidly increasing in number (De Valck 2007, p. 104). If festivals like Cannes, Venice and Berlin could count on their established reputation as the most important festivals in the world, many other international events all over Europe such as Locarno, Rotterdam, Thessaloniki, Turin and others had to find ways to promote themselves within the film festival circuit where many similar events were mushrooming. Festivals aimed to define their own character in order to be competitive and appeal to an audience of film professionals and film critics who had to choose which festival was worth attending in an increasingly busy yearly schedule. Hence, festivals competed not only on the basis of their programmes but also in terms of visibility, media coverage, sponsorship and public funds. The number of accredited guests and journalists also had an impact on the festival budgets, which were more and more dependent on private sponsors. Thus, the discovery of new cinemas and the introduction of new directors represented a crucial element for second-tier festivals which could not easily rely on world film stars to attract their audiences. It was not by chance that many of these festivals claimed their recognition of young film-makers as their main attraction.

In Italy, the Turin Cinema Giovani Film Festival featured a competitive section for first and second films, and under the direction of Alberto Barbera (1989-1998), it established its position as the second Italian festival. The Locarno film festival, established as early as 1946, under the direction of Marco Müller (1992-2000), became one of the major European festivals by reason of its regular introduction of new film-makers from non-Western territories. The Rotterdam film festival, founded in 1972, was the first to establish a specific fund to support film projects from the South and the East of the world (the Hubert Bals Fund).⁵

If the 1990s saw the proliferation of festivals in Europe, these were also the years in which films exhibited at festivals could more easily find theatrical, home video and TV distribution. Thus, the Iranian wave or the Chinese Fifth Generation films also responded to the needs of the art-house distribution companies which were active in Europe in exhibiting non-Hollywood films. That is how films from remote world territories proved to be suitable for these circuits: the cost of distribution rights was not too high and the audiences of European art-house films could be equally interested in films from China or Iran. It was only towards the turn of the century that the

5 For a description of the major international film festivals in Europe, their distinctive features and a possible periodization, cf. De Valck 2007.

art-house exhibition system declined drastically in Italy as elsewhere in Europe for many different reasons including the global reach of Hollywood cinema, the decline of the home video market, diminishing state support for alternative distribution circuits and the mushrooming of multiplexes which took over local theatres (Chin, Qualls 2001).

Hence, while international film festivals had long served to introduce *auteurs* to the international film scene, during the 1990s many festivals became more directly involved in supporting the so-called «new cinemas of the South or the East»; and after the turn of the century, festivals themselves became alternative distribution circuits (Peranson 2009, p. 23). But even before that, thanks to an umbrella of funds and supports, many films from China and other regions could be completed, exhibited and then distributed in the circuit of art-house theatres thanks to their festival participation.

Therefore, while participation in festivals was essential for certain films to enter the art-house distribution system, festivals promoted and defined a certain line of viable art-house cinema. As Wong (2011, pp. 65-99) and De Valck (2007, pp. 176-178) have remarked, although it would be impossible to classify films for festivals, the category of ‘festival films’ has been broadly identified with films that on the basis of their aesthetic or production values rely on festival participation. Chinese cinema introduced by European festivals matched this broad category although after the discovery of the Fifth Generation the Chinese films prominent at festivals were those presenting the rough aesthetic of contemporary China, mainly independent films.⁶ As Zhang noted, following the golden era of the Fifth Generation, there came the period when censorship was the drive to exhibit Chinese cinema (2002, p. 30).

It is worth noting how, throughout the 1990s, festivals shaped a crystallized notion of Chinese independent cinema, failing to account for the rapid transformation of the Chinese film market into a major global market. Rather than testifying to the increasing marginalization of Chinese filmmakers, which was caused primarily by economic forces and the expansion of the domestic market, festivals continued to emphasize political readings of Chinese films. Chinese independent cinema became a promotional strategy that could eventually function only within the festival circuit. Looking at this transformation through the lens of the international sales agents may shed some light on the connection between festivals and Chinese films following the discovery of the Fifth Generation.

6 For an overview of the terms used to approach the broad range of Chinese independent productions, see Pickowicz, Zhang 2006.

3 After the Fifth Generation: Chinese independent cinema and the role of sales agents

Although some of the Fifth Generation works were banned in China, their production was authorized and completed within the structure of the state studios. Thus, not only the aesthetics but also the production values displayed in the works of Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige differed significantly from the low-budget, off-the-record productions of younger directors such as Zhang Yuan and Wang Xiaoshuai. In addition, the ways through which their works reached the festivals differed significantly. Fifth Generation films reached the European festival screens either via festival representatives who travelled to Asia, or via the Hong Kong International Film Festival or even as official submissions from the Chinese Film Bureau.⁷

In fact, the prestigious visibility offered by Berlin, Venice and Cannes was an important aspect of the circulation of Chinese cinema in Europe, in particular at the early stages of the economic reforms.⁸ In order to screen state studio productions, festival could rely on direct negotiations either with the head of the studio or with the central film authorities that would be responsible for the correct delivery of screening material for festival presentation. Finally, as the state studios were also encouraged to open up to foreign trade, film rights could be handled directly for international distribution.

During the 1990s as a further result of the reform policy, state-controlled film production started to co-exist with other ways of film-making. Contacts and exchanges between foreign film professionals, festivals representatives and Chinese film-maker also increased. Furthermore, in 1994, the changes introduced in filmmaking regulations allowed international co-production and private investments, so by the mid-1990s more Chinese films were being produced outside the studio system. Although approval from the central authorities was still required from the very early stages of a project, film production started taking different paths and so reached European festivals.

Arguably, the films produced outside the studio system met the needs of those European events that were establishing their position in the competitive festival circuits as 'discovery festivals' supporting new talents from remote regions of the world.⁹ Locarno and Rotterdam with their newly

7 For an account of the role of the Hong Kong festival in the circulation of Chinese films, cf. Wong 2007, pp. 183-186.

8 As Wong has noted, festivals like Venice, Cannes and Berlin turned into 'brands' so that an entry to these events has an immediately valuable impact for the film, the film-makers and their producers (Wong 2011, p. 177).

9 For a vivid description of how the early films by Zhang Yuan and Wang Xiaoshuai were made and reached the festivals, cf. Ning 2005.

established production funds, and Turin, Thessaloniki and Nantes with their competitive sections were among the most active ones. An overview of Chinese films screened at these festivals in the 1990s would include Zhang Yuan's *Mama* 妈妈 (*Mother*, 1990) and *Beijing zazhong* 北京杂种 (*Beijing bastards*, 1993) (recipient of the Hubert Bals Fund, awarded in Locarno), Wang Xiaoshuai's *Dong chun de rizi* 冬春的日子 (*The days*, 1993; first screened at Rotterdam, awarded at Thessaloniki in 1995), Ning Ying's *Zhao le* 找了 (*For fun*, 1993; awarded at Nantes) and *Minjing gushi* 民警故事 (*On the beat*, 1995; awarded at Turin), Zhang Ming's *Wushan yun yu* 巫山云雨 (*In expectation*, 1995; awarded at Turin), Jia Zhangke's *Xiao Wu* 小武 (*The pickpocket*, 1997; awarded at the Berlin-Forum), Liu Bingjian's *Nannan nünü* 男男女女 (*Men and women*, 1999; awarded at Locarno). The first entries at major festivals were Zhang Yuan's *Dong gong Xi gong* 东宫西宫 (*East Palace, West Palace*, 1997) and *Guonian hui jia* 过年回家 (*Seventeen years*, 1999) in Venice. Interestingly, while the fortunes of the first Chinese independent films started at festivals other than Venice, Cannes and Berlin, the three major events continued to screen Fifth Generation film-makers as they were the only authorized entries from the People's Republic of China.

It was not only that independent film-makers could not be part of any official state submissions; festivals also had to rely on insider knowledge to be aware of the on-going, off-the-record production. Moreover, independent films could not easily exit China, not to mention the difficulty of achieving a suitable (and subtitled) material for festival screening.¹⁰ Finally, even when these obstacles were overcome, such films would still aim to enter the international distribution system and the material would need to remain outside China in order to be commercially handled and delivered. International sales agents joined in to respond to these festival needs, which were strictly connected to the often semi-clandestine nature of this kind of production.

Thus, international sales companies not only sold the rights for distribution in single territories but prior to that, they also offered support and expertise in the festival presentation: delivery of screening material, preparation of promotional material, contact with press and media and the like. For film-makers coming from regions that were new entries to the festival circuits, international sales agents provided guidance into the festival journey and conversely, for the festival, the guarantee of a delivery of the final product according to international standards.

The companies that most significantly contributed to the circulation of Chinese cinema in the 1990s include the Dutch-Hong Kong based For-tissimo (founded by Wouter Barendeth and Michael Werner in 1991),

¹⁰ With reference to China, festival directors draw upon either their own expertise or on experts in place that could help both during the submission process and for the delivery of the screening material.

Hengameh Panahi's Celluloid Dreams, Marin Karmitz's MK2 and Philippe Bober's Co-production Office (founded in 1987). In the following years, Film Distribution (founded in 1997), Wild Bunch (founded in 2002) and Memento Films (founded in 2005) increased the competition among international sales companies involved in Chinese films. With the exception of Fortissimo, all others are French-based companies.

Towards the end of the 1990s, international sales agents also contributed to the transition of Chinese independent film-makers from second-tiers festival to Cannes and Venice. This shift coincided with an increasing emphasis on the controversial contents of the post-Fifth Generation films, as in the case of Zhang Yuan's *East Palace, West Palace*, the first Chinese gay film presented in Cannes, distributed by Fortissimo. Contrary to the immediate appeal of their predecessors, the rough aesthetics of Zhang Yuan's works was not easy to sell. Yet these films functioned well with the festival press and media both for their clandestine nature and for their controversial subjects. This sensationalism, related to political and censorship issues, was fruitful to festivals in terms of media coverage and to sales agents in terms of promotional strategies towards national distributors.

By the turn of the century, the interest of the three major European festivals had already shifted towards Chinese independent films. The 1990s could be seen not only as a crucial decade in the transformation of the Chinese film industry but also, as De Valck pointed out, festivals at that time became more institutionalized (2007, p. 193). Festivals had to prove successful in all respects in order to negotiate with private sponsors; and their budgets depended more significantly on their performance in terms of number of guests, media coverage. Even how many films were distributed after the festival became a crucial factor in the festival performance, so that titles included in the programme were expected to find national distribution.

In order to guarantee the best promotion to all exhibited films, receive a better press coverage and have more films circulating afterwards, some international sales companies were encouraged to handle titles even before the festival screenings. Hence, international sales companies started being involved not only in the festival exhibition, but also during the production stage. This process somehow initiated what would be a sort of 'vicious circle' in the mutual interdependence of festivals and sales agents.¹¹

The rules of the games which had structured festival exhibition practices in the name of artistic values and aesthetic achievements started to change: although festivals had always been sites of complex cultural, economic, and political negotiations, the increasing pressure of the market

11 Peranson has also addressed the role and power-position of international sales agents in the festival circuit (2009, pp. 29-32).

forced them into a tighter competitive system. Competition among major festivals would soon bring about concerns for world premieres, an issue that became more prominent during the 2000s.

The case of the 1999 Venice International Film Festival, when both Zhang Yimou and Zhang Yuan entered the competition is emblematic of this transition. Zhang Yimou's *Not one less* won the Golden Lion and Zhang Yuan's *Seventeen years* the Silver Lion-Special Jury Prize. *Seventeen years* was Zhang Yuan's first approved film and a co-production with the Italian Fabrica Cinema.¹² Government authorization was essential to have the film competing in the same section of Zhang Yimou's film, as for the first time a festival would present two Chinese entries competing for the same awards. This was possible only thanks to an informal agreement: the announcement of Zhang Yuan's film, the second Chinese entry, would be made at a later stage in order to focus media attention on Zhang Yimou's *Not one less*. Although Zhang Yuan's film was authorized, the late press release played on the expectations of a 'banned' title, understating the fact that for the first time Zhang Yuan was presenting an approved film.

Major festivals and sales agents continued to rely on political and censorship issues even when the transformation of the Chinese film industry had already made clear that the major obstacle for the circulation of Chinese festival films was their non-commercial nature. As the Chinese film market expanded and the performance of Chinese titles started being competitive against American titles at the box-office, these films were excluded from domestic exhibition regardless of their status vis-à-vis Chinese film authorities.

Hence, the early notion of Chinese independent cinema had not only departed from its reference to off-the-record productions, but also had turned into a fixed exhibition pattern, which immediately evoked sensitive subjects and political censorship. By the time Jia Zhangke's *Sanxia hao ren* 三峡好人 (*Still life*, 2006) on the Three Gorges dam was awarded the Venice Golden Lion, the Chinese production and exhibition system had already significantly changed. The year 2006 saw China's box office gross growing by 30%, an increase of 23% in film production in comparison to the previous year (from 260 up to 330 films) and Zhang Yimou on top of the box office hits with *Mancheng jindai huangjinjia* 满城尽带黄金甲 (*Curse of the golden flower*, 2006) (Yu 2007). Although the censorship had not loosened its control, *Still life*, like Jia's previous *Shijie* 世界 (*The world*, 2004) was approved and supported by the Shanghai Film Studio. The limited circulation of these films in China was due to their non-commercial nature rather than to political censorship. Nonetheless, the festival reinforced the same

12 Fabrica Cinema was established in 1998 as part of Benetton's communication research centre. During the years 2000-2004 was headed by Marco Müller and co-produced the works of independent filmmakers from China, Thailand, Brasil, Russia and Turkey.

notion of Chinese independent cinema by announcing the participation of *Still life* in Venice competition at a later stage, in a way not dissimilar from Zhang Yuan's *Seventeen years*. The film was thus inscribed in a narrative of Chinese independent cinema which had become a specific festival discourse while the actual practice of independent film-making in China had already taken many different turns and nuances.¹³ In other words, the notion of Chinese independent cinema continued to circulate at major international film festivals as long as works that were otherwise difficult to distribute could benefit from being promoted as 'controversial', 'secretly shot', 'banned' or 'censored'.

Wang Bing's *Jiabiangou* 夹边沟 (*The ditch*, 2010) offers a more recent example of how the festival discourse on Chinese independent films failed to account for the changes in Chinese film-making since the turn of the century. Wang Bing's film on the labour camps during the Anti-rightist Campaign of 1957 was the result of a long production process which involved a set of European companies including the international sales agent Wild Bunch. Like Jia Zhangke's *Still life*, it entered the Venice competition as a 'surprise film' and was announced just before the opening of the festival. In this case, the film presented indeed sensitive political contents however its resonance against the booming Chinese film industry was so marginal that not even its controversial topic made an impact on the Chinese media. After the economic crises of 2008, difficulties in distributing Chinese films (like any other non-commercial film) had become more evident in Europe as elsewhere. As alternative distribution circuits collapsed, the connection between Chinese film-makers, international sales agents and festivals also took a different turn. Against the backdrop of the second largest world's economy, the festival discourse of Chinese independent cinema has rapidly lost its appeal. Conversely, major European festivals have become promotional opportunities for the many different players of the booming Chinese film industry in search of glamour and prestige.

4 Conclusion

This fairly limited overview hints at the complex discourse that festivals articulate in relation to the films they present. The ways in which Chinese independent films were exhibited at major festivals since the late 1990s evolved into a crystallized exhibition pattern which was shaped by the converging interests of European festivals, sales agents and the distribution system at a specific stage in the evolution of European festivals and

¹³ For a detailed account and discussion of the variety of Chinese independent filmmaking since the mid-1990s, cf. Voci 2010.

the Chinese film industry. During the 1990s, as European festivals became more closely linked to political, social and economic issues vis-à-vis global competition, emerging Chinese film-makers working outside the studio system constituted the ideal partners for festivals which focussed on young talents.

Yet while Chinese independent production has taken different turns along with China's fast-paced transformation, festivals have continued to emphasize political and censorship issues, thus overshadowing the increasing pressure of economic forces. Until the early 2000s, such a discourse might still have helped the circulation of Chinese films in the European art-house distribution circuit. However, as distribution opportunities diminished, the role of festivals and international sales agents have diminished.

The domestic release of Diao Yinan's *Black coal, thin ice* (2014) - Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival - might open to further considerations and signal a shift in the role of festivals for Chinese non-commercial films. While its European sales - handled by Fortissimo - are still limited, the film was a box-office hit in China. The film, which evolves around a series of brutal murders in northern China in 1999, was marketed in China as a noir film and the Berlin award for the first time proved to be a crucial promotional tool in the domestic market.

Bibliography

- Chan, Felicia (2011). «The international film festival and the making of a national cinema». *Screen*, 52 (2), pp. 253-260.
- Chin, Daryl; Qualls, Larry (2001). «Open circuits, closed markets: Festivals and expositions of film and video». *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, 23 (1), pp. 33-47.
- De Valck, Marijke (2007). *Film festivals: From European geopolitics to global cinephilia*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Elsaesser, Thomas (2005). «Film festival network: The new topographies of cinema in Europe». In: Elsaesser, Thomas, *European cinema: Face to face with Hollywood*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, pp. 82-106.
- Iordanova, Dina (ed.) (2014). *The film festival reader*. St. Andrews: St. Andrews Film Studies.
- Jia Zhangke 贾樟柯; Wu Guanping 吴冠平 (2008). «Xunzhao ziji de dianying zhi mei» 寻找自己的电影之美 (In pursuit of one's own film beauty). *Dianying yishu* 电影艺术, 6, pp. 69-74.
- Ning Dai (2005). «La nascita del cinema indipendente: La Sesta generazione». In: Müller, Marco; Pollacchi, Elena (a cura di), *Ombre Elettriche: Cento anni di cinema cinese (1905-2005)*, Milano: Electa, pp. 146-156.
- Neal, Steve (1981). «Art cinema as institution». *Screen*, 22 (1), pp. 11-40.